

STRANGERS, STATUS PROTEST,
AND MARGINAL MEN

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The marginal man has been described as the product of simultaneous involvement in several social worlds. Because he is both attracted to and repelled by divergent aspects of each of these worlds, the marginal man is thought to be especially vulnerable to moral conflicts and tensions. But he is also said to possess greater human understanding and broader social awareness - and for much the same reasons.

Surprisingly, however, main line social theory - whether Middle Range or broadly Systemic - tends to take a rather limited view of the theme of marginality. Robert Merton, for example,² encapsulates marginal men in the category of "ineligible aspirant" to social membership in his statement on reference group theory, while the authors of Theories of Society deal with marginality as that "deviance-prone" condition found among members of incompatible groups.³ Nowhere in functional sociology is one likely to find the richness and complexity conveyed by Georg Simmel, Robert Park and E. C. Hughes, in their essays on the same theme.⁴

To some extent perhaps, as David Riesman suggests, contemporary social theory misses much of the significance of marginality because it brackets the issue of change in order to deal with the problem of order in society. Unfortunately, Riesman argues, proponents of this view would have us return to a "social system in which everyone was supposedly rooted, in which there were⁵ no marginal people . . . (where) everyone had a place and knew it."

Riesman's criticism seems specially cogent in view of the pluralism which now describes Western society. What Simmel said of the Jew and Park of the immigrant may now mark our own social condition; mobility and urbanization have not only increased contacts between cultures but also have brought about fragmentation of formerly cohesive social worlds.⁶ New identities generated by social movements (students, Black militants, and the like) produce sub-cultures which then evolve their own communities. Problems arise, of course, but along side them one may also find the finer characteristics of marginality: namely, "wider wisdom,"⁸ "keener intelligence," and "the more detached and rational viewpoint." Surely it is only if one brackets the issue of change that marginality can be reduced to "ineligible aspirant" or "deviance-prone" behavior.

However, if one removes the brackets from change and reinstates them instead around the problem of order, he ought to show cause for doing so. To put it another way, the dynamic features of marginality

may be accented provided there is some available theoretical framework which relate them to plausible assertions about the relationship between man and society. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman's statement on the social dialectic is appropriate here.

Since society exists as both objective and subjective reality, any adequate theoretical understanding of it must comprehend both these aspects....(T)hese aspects receive their proper recognition if society is understood in terms of an ongoing dialectic process composed of the three moments of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. As far as the societal phenomenon is concerned, these moments are not to be thought of as occurring in a temporal sequence. Rather society and each part of it are simultaneously characterized by these three moments, so that any analysis in terms of only one or two of them falls short. The same is true of the individual member of society who simultaneously externalizes his own being into the social world and internalizes it as an objective reality. In other words, to be in society is to participate in its dialectic.

With reference to marginality, then, the three dialectic moments have to do with how the individual produces the conditions of his own marginal status; and, similarly, how this marginal role produces the kind of person who can ongoingly perpetuate marginality. ¹⁰ Simmel's "Stranger," for instance, imparts or projects onto society qualities not already part of its culture, qualities which are somehow incorporated in the objective social structure through the ongoing involvement of the stranger. These qualities, then, serve to create a societal condition which Hughes calls "status contradiction": namely, one which imposes on individuality characteristics not altogether wanted yet quite unescapable. This contradiction entails a dilemma because what the person is defined as being is neither wholly consistent with nor other than his self. Consequently, he initiates a protest against this assigned identity - such protest being the measure of how thoroughly he has become a marginal man. His marginality, then, sustains his role as somehow estranged from the social order. In what follows these several ideas are looked at more closely in the context supplied by Simmel, Park and Hughes.

GEORG SIMMEL

In Simmel's essay on "The Stranger," the phenomenon of marginality is brilliantly delineated. It was to this seminal piece

of sociological work that Robert Park referred in his later formulation of the marginal man concept. Simmel first notes that:

If wondering is the liberation from every given point in space, and thus the conceptual opposite to fixation at such a point, the sociological form of the "stranger" presents the unity...of these two characteristics.¹¹

At the outset, therefore, the stranger expresses in appropriately paradoxical form the ambiguity of social milieux. He is not only the person who is present and thus somehow involved with others, but he is also at the same time somehow independent of them.

Implied by this notion is the peculiarly sociological feature of estrangement: The stranger's distance from others is really an affirmation of his relationship to them. In this sense, marginality emerges as a dimension of all social relationships. This is put with characteristic perceptiveness by Simmel:

The unity of nearness and remoteness involved in every human relation is organized, in the phenomenon of the stranger, in a way which may be most briefly formulated by saying that in the relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near. For, to be a stranger is naturally a very positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction.... (The stranger's) position as a full-fledged member involves both being outside it and confronting it.¹²

In other words, the specific relevance of the stranger is that his involvement with the group is simultaneously derivative from his detachment. Nor is this just a bit of whimsical equivocation. If the individual, whom we call here the stranger, were simply a non-entity, if he did not hold a meaningful place inside the group milieu, then he would not matter - he would be "non-present." As such, his "reality" would hold none for the group. On the other hand, however, the stranger is there; he is present and his presence is meaningful for the group qua group.

The operative point here has to do with the stranger's objectivity. He is the relatively autonomous person. So far as given societal structures are concerned, the stranger has no irrevocable commitments. His participation is characterized by an openness to change which militates against his becoming immersed in the ongoing definitions of the situation.¹³ In other words, the stranger's involvement

with the group is such that he retains some degree of separateness from it. As Simmel points out, he is not so likely as more intimate group members to uphold established ideologies and therefore can take a more critical attitude toward them - particularly with reference to group interests and values. From this position, then, the stranger is better able to initiate changes in the system; witness, for example, the degree to which changes in the academic community are produced by relatively transient and apparently estranged students rather than more intransigent faculty or administration.

Another implication of the objective nature of the stranger's involvement with the group has to do with generic properties of social relations. In the sense that the stranger embodies something common to all relationships, the feature of objectivity is a general one; that is to say, there is in every web of relations, in which individuals are the subjects, a certain distant quality. More to the point, the ongoing relationships or a social group have built into them an anonymity which somehow enables individuals to retain their autonomy.¹⁴

Which, of course, suggests that as a stranger the individual can project himself - his meanings - outward to the group. Since these meanings do not stem from the group itself, yet entail socially relevant features, it is likely they will be appropriated and incorporated into ongoing group life. To externalize human being, then, implies a position somewhat outside normal social structures; but not so far removed as to be totally detached from them. In short, one must function in the role of stranger if he is legitimately to alter society.¹⁵ And, of course, it is always to some extent as a stranger that the individual first approaches any ongoing social order; indeed, even to produce some form of society necessarily involves the coming together of individuals who are strangers to one another and, who partly remain so despite their joint collective enterprise.¹⁶

This perhaps is why the stranger can in fact impart something of his own to the group, and why each can in his own way sometime play the stranger's role. For example, there are moments when even one's wife discloses that she is not to be taken for granted - that she possesses qualities not reducible to the husband-wife relationship itself. Such moments are absolutely critical to the future of the relationship; they change it somehow. Similarly, it is only because more opaque relationships - for example, between Blacks and Whites - also involve modes of possible intimacy that strangers can become spouses in the first place. Briefly, then, Simmel's essay has something to say about the externalization process by which human projects become group enterprises, particularly within the context of an ongoing societal life.

ROBERT EZRA PARK

Park's original essay on the marginal man deals with the internalization moment in the social dialectic; the obverse to that of externalization just imputed to Simmel's stranger. Empirically, internalization is dramatized by the Medieval Jew - perhaps the prototype of marginality.

When, however, the walls of the medieval ghetto were torn down and the Jew was permitted to participate in the cultural life of the peoples among whom he lived, there appeared a new type of personality....¹⁷

The upshot of this was, according to Park, a cultural hybrid:

...a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and no quite accepted...in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two cultures...which never¹⁸ completely interpenetrated and fused.

Similar circumstances, moreover, also confront "every immigrant during the period of transition."¹⁹ Resident in the marginal man is what Park calls a sense of moral dicotomy; he is, significantly, a person who experiences a period of inner turmoil and intense self-consciousness.²⁰

These observations are important enough to underscore. The marginal man is morally ambivalent because he belongs to different social worlds each organized in terms of the legitimation of different sets of objective cultural norms and values. Allied with this one ought not ignore Park's suggestive remark that "there are no doubt periods of transition and crisis in the lives of most of us that are comparable with these" of the marginal man.²¹ In other words, there is a sense in which marginality is the consequence of involvement in heterogeneous situations which, of course,²² are increasingly characteristic of a pluralistic social order.

In contrast with the role of stranger, then, that of the marginal man concerns internalization rather externalization. That is, the marginal man maintains the societal objects originally produced by the stranger. Or, in other words, strangers create the conditions of their own marginality; and it is marginality that provides the possibility of being a stranger in society. What neither Simmel nor

Park provide, however, is an explanation of the link between estrangement and marginality: how does being a stranger produce marginal men and in what sense do marginal men ongoingly support being a stranger?²³ For this E. C. Hughes' essays are apposite.

E. C. HUGHES

Hughes brings together externalization and internalization in his analysis of marginality from the standpoint of role theory. He writes:

It is from the angle of status that I propose to analyze the phenomenon of marginality. Status is a term of society in that it refers specifically to a system of relations between people. But the definition of the status lies in the culture.²⁴

Hughes emphasizes what may be called the dualism of marginality - that is to say, both its objective and subjective dimensions. Objectively, marginality is the product of "status contradiction."²⁵ Status contradictions exist when individuals possess valued qualities which ordinarily would lead to the acquisition of certain statuses, but are prevented from doing so because of the possession of still other predefined characteristics. While the literature on race relations discloses various examples of status contradiction, the peculiar appeal of Hughes' formulation lies in his attempt to discern such objective contradictions in all social systems. Status contradiction, to put it differently, represents the objectivation of qualities imparted to ongoing society by individuals whose social involvement unescapably is one of relative societal estrangement.

Subjectively, marginality has to do with the specific manner in which status contradictions are experienced by the individual. This involves what Hughes calls the "status dilemma."²⁶ The dilemma consists of the individual's willingness to accept the status to which he is consigned by society and his inability completely to free himself from it. In other words, he discovers that his social involvements generate a personal identity that is both intolerable and necessary. It is intolerable because the individual is not wholly the "typical" person his assigned status would have him be. However, his assigned identity is necessary because he is really not wholly other than what social definitions imply.²⁷

A final point in Hughes' exposition of marginality is pertinent here: whether marginality is limited to specific historic circumstances or constitutes instead an essential aspect of all social action.

His position seems to be perfectly cogent:

Might there not be, in the most settled society, persons who are in protest against the roles assigned them; persons, even, who want to play some role for which there is no precedent or defined place in their culture? I do not think we know the answer to these questions. But we have some clues. They suggest that the human individual does not passively accept society's answer to the question, 'Who am I?' with all its implications of present and future conduct.²⁸

To view the individual-social theme in this way clearly points up not only that objective structures determine subjective consciousness but also how really impermanent these structures are - for they ultimately depend on the individual's ongoing maintenance of them. Because the individual remains to some extent estranged from these structures, though he maintains them somewhat marginally, the likelihood of change is omnipresent.

Such estrangement, furthermore, means that the individual will continue to project onto objective societal structures qualities not already there. To "take," however, these qualities must be objectivated - which is to say alienated - and thus become dehumanized. Here, then, is the dialectic moment in which marginal men experience the dilemma against which a protest somehow may be initiated. Despite this, however, even the most effective protest will nonetheless produce eventually still another set of status contradictions.

Perhaps the foregoing is best summarized in dialectic terms: The individual approaches ongoing society as a stranger, such societal estrangement being the result of his marginal relationship to that society. However, as he gives more time and attention to society (impart new meaning to it) he becomes less the stranger he was but only to the extent that society itself becomes less foreign to him. This, of course, entails social change and personal alternation both. Social change, moreover, entails objective status-role contradictions as new cultural elements are grafted onto the old, and eventually such contradictions produce marginal men. Here the process is recurrent as new conditions of estrangement (*i.e.*, protest) develop. Sociologically, then, every stranger contains within himself the seeds of his own marginality. But this phenomenal condition becomes accessible to the individual only through the course of its objectivation as a status contradiction. Awareness that one is a marginal man, then, reinstates all the opportunities for personal freedom that are characteristic of being a stranger.

FOOTNOTES

1. Everett V. Stonequist, The Marginal Man, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937. Note, especially, Robert E. Park's introductory essay to this study.
2. Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, The Free Press, 1964. See the essay on "Continuities in the Theory on Reference Groups and Social Structure."
3. Talcott Parsons, et. al., Theories of Society, Vol, II, The Free Press, 1961, esp. pp. 709-12.
4. Appropriate citations follow in due course.
5. David Riesman, Individualism Reconsidered, The Free Press, 1954. Riesman draws a useful distinction between open and secret marginality. Open marginality, of course, refers to cases in which clear evidence attests one's marginality - leading, interestingly, to the development of groups whose purpose is to define the individual's marginal position: This is society's way of legitimating marginality. Secret marginality, however, is not easily known to others. This suggests that, possibly, social mechanisms for dealing with secret marginality do not exist - thereby allowing much room for the secretly marginal man to engage in a bit of micro-sociological subversion vis-a-vis group structures.
6. See, for example, Maurice Stein, The Eclipse of Community, Harper & Row Publishers, 1964.
7. Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements, The Free Press, 1964.
8. Stonequist, op. cit., Cf. Riesman, op. cit.
9. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality, Doubleday and Company, 1968, p. 129.
10. Ibid., esp. pp. 163-173.
11. Kurt H. Wolff (ed.), The Sociology of Georg Simmel, The Free Press, 1950, p. 402.
12. Ibid., p. 402.
13. See, for example, Alfred Schutz, Collected Papers, Vol. I, Martinus Nijhoff, 1962.
14. Ibid., p. 405.

FOOTNOTES CONTINUED

15. Strangers are sometimes called innovators or even deviants. It seems, however, that the first term suggests too much while the second is an epithet. Neither really captures the sense of radical otherness individuals unescapably bring to social engagements. Cf. Erving Goffman, Behavior in Public Places, The Free Press, 1963. Also Kurt Riezler, Man: Mutable and Immutable, Henry Regnery, 1950.
16. Berger and Luckman, op. cit., p. 47 ff.
17. Robert E. Park, Race and Culture, The Free Press, 1950, p. (Park first presented his ideas on marginality in "Human Migration and The Marginal Man," American Journal of Sociology, May 1928, 881-893. Here, however, references are based on Race and Culture.)
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Stonequist, op. cit.
23. Park does, however, make some suggestive observations about the marginal man acquiring a sense of self under the influence of the individual's conception of himself as determined by his role in relationship to other persons.
24. Everett C. Hughes and Helen Hughes, Where People Meet, The Free Press, 1952, pp. 190-191. The term status is often used interchangeably with that of role. See, for example, Michael Banton, Roles: An Introduction To The Study of Social Relations, Tavistock, 1968.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., Also Everett C. Hughes, Men and Their Work, The Free Press, 1958, pp. 102-115.
27. Cf. Anselm Strauss (ed.) George Herbert Mead: On Social Psychology, University of Chicago Press, 1956. Hughes' analysis of status dilemma is brilliantly evocative of Mead's exposition of the "I" and "Me" as constitutive aspects of the self.
28. Hughes and Hughes, op. cit., p. 198.